

1996

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Gene H. Anderson

University of Richmond, ganderso@richmond.eduFollow this and additional works at: <http://scholarship.richmond.edu/music-faculty-publications>Part of the [African American Studies Commons](#), [Cultural History Commons](#), [Musicology Commons](#), and the [Other Music Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Anderson, Gene H. "Blues for You Johnny: Johnny Dodds and His "Wild Man Blues" Recordings of 1927 and 1938." *Annual Review of Jazz Studies* 8:39-62.

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BLUES FOR YOU, JOHNNY: JOHNNY DODDS AND HIS “WILD MAN BLUES” RECORDINGS OF 1927 AND 1938

Gene Anderson

I

Shortly after Johnny Dodd’s death Sidney Bechet invited Johnny’s brother to join his New Orleans Feetwarmers in a recording honoring Bechet’s hometown musical colleague and lifelong friend. Although Baby Dodds pronounced “Blues for You, Johnny,” recorded in Chicago on September 6, 1940, a “fine tribute,” *Down Beat* found vocalist Herb Jeffries “from hunger on blues.”¹ A more fitting memorial would have been “Wild Man Blues” cut by Bechet a few months previously. Said to be his favorite number,² “Wild Man Blues” was recorded by Dodds three times in 1927 and once again in 1938. This study examines Johnny Dodds’s style of performance and methods of improvisation by comparing the extant recordings, of which, counting alternate takes, there are six (Table 1).

**Table 1: Publication and Recording Chronology
of “Wild Man Blues”**

February 5, 1927: Copyright deposit of a lead sheet for “Ted Lewis Blues” by Jelly Roll Morton, sent in by Melrose Brothers Music Company of Chicago (see Example 1).

April 22, 1927: Recording of “Ted Lewis Blues” as “Wild Man Blues” for Brunswick (two takes) in Chicago by Johnny Dodds’s Black Bottom Stompers (Louis Armstrong, trumpet; Roy Palmer, trombone; Dodds, clarinet; Barney Bigard, tenor saxophone; Earl Hines, piano; Bud Scott, banjo; Baby Dodds, drums).³ Morton and Armstrong are listed as joint composers, the verse is omitted, and the chorus (in concert F minor) is repeated with back-to-back solos by trumpet and clarinet.

May 7, 1927: Recording of “Wild Man Blues” for Okeh in Chicago by Louis Armstrong’s Hot Seven (Armstrong, trumpet; Fred Robinson?, trombone;⁴ Dodds, clarinet; Lil Armstrong, piano; Johnny St. Cyr, banjo/guitar; Pete Briggs, tuba; Baby Dodds, drums).⁵ Morton and Armstrong are listed as joint composers; the form and key duplicate the Stompers’ recording.

June 4, 1927: Recording of “Wild Man Blues” for Bluebird (two takes) in Chicago by Jelly Roll Morton’s Red Hot Peppers (George Mitchell, cornet; Gerald Reeves, trombone; Dodds, clarinet; Paul “Stump” Evans, alto saxophone; Morton, piano; Bud Scott, guitar; Quinn Wilson, tuba; Baby Dodds, drums).⁶ Armstrong and Morton share composer credit on the label; the form follows the lead sheet, except that a chorus (in concert F minor) precedes the verse (in concert A_♭ major), which is succeeded in turn by two more choruses.

June 8, 1927: Copyright of a piano solo in A_♭ major/F minor of “Wild Man Blues” by Melrose Brothers Music Company. On the front cover Morton is listed as the composer, but on the first page of music Armstrong and Morton are both credited; the form follows the lead sheet except for a repeat of the chorus.

July?, 1927: Orchestration of “Wild Man Blues” published by Melrose. Other than a modulation into concert C minor for the first chorus after the verse, the form and keys duplicate the Peppers recording. The arrangement by Tiny Parham includes a rough transcription of Armstrong’s introduction and opening chorus from take 1 of the Stompers recording. Morton is credited as the composer on the cover but the parts list both Morton and Armstrong.

January 21, 1938: Recording of “Wild Man Blues” for Decca in New York City by Johnny Dodds and His Chicago Boys (Charlie Shavers, trumpet; Dodds, clarinet; Lil Armstrong, piano; Teddy Bunn, guitar; John Kirby, bass; O’Neill Spencer, washboard). Although in concert G minor, the form follows the Stompers recording with the addition of a chorus each for guitar solo and ensemble (clarinet-trumpet duet).⁷

Example 1 is an edited lead sheet of Jelly Roll Morton’s “Ted Lewis Blues.”⁸ The copyright deposit reveals that the composer had a band piece in mind from the start, and the specific indication of a break for clarinet (Ted Lewis’s nominal instrument) may explain the title. The dedication could have occurred to Morton after catching Lewis’s act at Billy Bottoms’s Dreamland Café, where the famous “jazz king” appeared as a guest of the black musicians’ union the previous October.⁹

By "Jelly Roll" Morton

Slow Intro

Verse

Chorus

Break

Clar.

- (1) No E-natural in original
- (2) No triplet sign in original
- (3) C-sharp in original
- (4) F-sharp in original
- (5) G-flat in original
- (6) C-flat in original
- (7) No dot in original
- (8) F-flat in original

Example 1: "Ted Lewis Blues"

Like many tunes from the 1920s whose titles include the word “blues,” the composition lacks the 12-bar blues chord progression, but in this case the presence of blue or minor thirds and multiple breaks in the chorus evoke a pervasive blues character.

Marketability was the probable motivation for including Louis Armstrong, already billed “The World’s Greatest Jazz Cornetist” in the *Chicago Defender*,¹⁰ as co-composer of “Wild Man Blues.” In her bi-discography of Morton, Laurie Wright cites Lil Armstrong’s insistence that the tune was her husband’s, but in a c. 1970 phone interview with Bill Russell, Armstrong said he played the piece but didn’t write it.¹¹

II

1927 was the pinnacle of Johnny Dodds’s career. Born in New Orleans in 1892, he began playing professionally around 1912 with Kid Ory, with whom he continued off and on until Ory moved to California in 1919.¹² Except for a tour through the South and Midwest with Mack’s Merry Makers vaudeville troupe in the latter half of 1918, Dodds remained in the Crescent City until summoned to Chicago by King Oliver to join his Creole Jazz Band at the Dreamland Café in early 1921.¹³

Dodds stayed with the Creole Band until falling out with Oliver in autumn 1923, after which, in apparent retaliation, Oliver replaced him with Jimmie Noone on the Columbia recordings of mid-October. Oliver’s emerging egotism had generated friction—Baby Dodds charged that after the recordings for Gennett in April 1923 “our band” became “his band”—and recording royalties sent to Oliver for distribution to band members began suspiciously to diminish. When after an argument Oliver refused to produce the royalty checks, the band broke up.¹⁴ Johnny Dodds then began a residency at Burt Kelly’s Stables on Chicago’s North Side that lasted until its closure for alleged Prohibition violations on New Year’s Day, 1930.¹⁵

With over one hundred titles already to his credit as sideman with Oliver, Armstrong, and dozens of lesser luminaries since 1923, the session producing “Wild Man Blues” on April 22, 1927, was Dodds’s premiere as leader. Possibly he learned about the tune from Frank Melrose, one of the music-publishing brothers who sent in the copyright deposit for “Ted Lewis Blues” and with whose Dixieland Thumpers Dodds recorded some rejected sides for Gennett in late February. Other than the title change, probably an impulsive decision made at the studio,¹⁶ the



Example 2: Trumpet motive from Take 1 of “Wild Man Blues” by Dodd’s Black Bottom Stompers¹⁷

most obvious differences between the recording and the version of the piece submitted as a copyright deposit involve form. Stripped down to its chorus, the work is a showpiece for Armstrong and Dodds, whose almost-equal-length solos dominate the proceedings (see Table 2). The rhythm plays continuously for the first ten bars of Armstrong’s solo and the first fourteen bars of Dodds’s solo, making into fills the breaks implied on the leadsheet. Armstrong, as later with the Hot Seven, opens the relatively elaborate introduction with breaks, the most prominent structural feature of the piece, and concludes the introduction with a motive recalled at the end his solo and again in the coda (see Example 2).

The Black Bottom Stompers’ take 1 presents a typical Dodds solo. Almost entirely in the low or chalumeau register, he plays with a full, rich, and dark tone quality characterized by an intense below-the-center-of-pitch vibrato.¹⁸ Adhering closely to the melody, Dodds provides few surprises within the fills and breaks, which tend to be arpeggiations of the prevailing harmony spiced by an occasional blue note (e.g., the G_b in bar 56). He maintains the listener’s interest within these narrow melodic and harmonic parameters by a judicious variety of rhythms, articulations, and dynamics.

Dodds’s articulation of choice is the slur or legato tongue, reserving regular tonguing or staccato for emphasis, as in the break at bars 55–56. Blue notes in particular are distinguished by glissandi and lipped pitch inflections, used either separately (bars 42, 46, 56) or together (bars 65–66). Besides these embellishments Dodds could produce broader effects like prolonged descending smears over wide intervals and an exaggerated vibrato in the high register resembling a horse whinny, both audible, for example, on “Oh Lizzie” recorded the day before “Wild Man Blues.” The “horse whinny” (intimated in bars 65 and 67 of the Hot Seven recording) is the closest approach to what Dodds called “clown playing,” for he eschewed the whines, squawks, and squeaks of Wilber Sweatman, Ted Lewis, and others so popular in his day.¹⁹

Although generally superior to take 1, take 2 of the Stompers’ recording was kept from commercial release in 1927 by Armstrong’s fluffed note

Take 1 *Clarinet* *mp*

Take 2 *mp*

Chords: Fm, C⁷, D^{♭7}, C⁷, Fm, C⁷, Fm, C⁷, D^{♭7}, C⁷, Fm, C⁷, F⁷, B^{♭7} even 8ths, B^{♭7}, even 8ths, C⁷, Fm, C⁷, D^{♭7}, C⁷, Fm, B^{♭m7}, C⁷, Fm, C⁷

Example 3: Dodds's solos in Takes 1 and 2 of "Wild Man Blues" by his Black Bottom Stompers

in the first bar of the introduction. Dodds's solo is essentially the same, but his alterations, made presumably without reflection and within minutes of the previous take, are improvements—intensifying the structure and injecting additional variety to modify more favorably the balance of fulfilled

The musical score is written for two staves in a key of B-flat major (three flats). The first system (measures 48-51) features a melody in the upper staff and a bass line in the lower staff. Chords indicated above the staff are Fm, Bbm, C#7, and C7. The second system (measures 52-55) continues the melody and bass line. Chords indicated are G7, Bb7, and Bb7. A bracket labeled "gut bucket" spans measures 52 and 53. The score ends with a double bar line at measure 55.

Example 3: continued

and thwarted expectations. The third of the harmony (A_4), for example, makes an unsatisfactory cadence in bar 48 of take 1, which Dodds seems to realize almost too late by barely sounding the root (F) before beginning the next phrase. Consequently he gives the root greater emphasis in take 2. In addition, Dodds replaces the repetitious B_4 -C pattern in bars 48–49 of take 1 with a dramatic octave leap (shifted from bar 50 of take 1), and shapes more effectively bars 49–54 by making a single downward arc from F to D_4 (climaxing on the downbeat of measure 52) and back to F in measure 54 (isolated by rests, embellished by a glissando, and intensified by a pronounced vibrato), which sets up superbly the double-time break in bars 55–56.²⁰ Other felicitous adjustments include the elimination of the disruptive leap of a tenth between bars 60–61, the combination of gut-bucket timbre (Dodds's nickname in the Ory Band was "Toilet") with hemiola rhythm for the break in bars 65–66, and the interpolation of a blue fifth (C_5) in bar 68. (See Example 3 for a comparison of Dodds's solos in Takes 1 and 2 of "Wild Man Blues" by his Black Bottom Stompers.

The Hot Seven "Wild Man Blues" of two weeks later is leaner and rougher than its predecessor but the style more homogeneous. The elegant and refined accompaniment by Hines and Scott on the Stompers' recordings seemed to contradict the passionate playing of Armstrong and Dodds, who are supported on the Hot Seven session by the heavier and simpler background of Lil Armstrong, Briggs, and St. Cyr, and whose discontinuous accompaniment transforms the chorus into a series of two-bar segments alternating between accompanied melody and solo breaks. The opportunity to play several breaks—and at a tempo slower than the

Table 2

Black Bottom Stompers Recording of "Wild Man Blues": Formal Scheme

Section	Intro		Chorus 1					
Subsection			A1			B1		
Instrumentation	Trp Brk	Ens	Trumpet Solo	Brk	Solo/Brk	Trumpet Solo	Break	Solo/Brk
Measures	2+2	4	10	2	2/2	8	2+2	2/2
Keys	A♭ Major		F Minor					

Chorus 2				Coda
A2		B2		
Clarinet Solo	Brk	Clarinet Solo	Break	Ens
14	2	8	2+2	4
F Minor				A♭ Major

Hot Seven Recording of "Wild Man Blues": Formal Scheme

Section	Intro		Chorus 1					
Subsection			A1			B1		
Instrumentation	Trp Brk	Ens	Trumpet Solo/Break			Trp Solo/Break	Break	Solo/Brk
Measures	2+2	4	2/2/2/2/2/2/2			2/2/2/2	2+2	2/2
Keys	A♭ Major		F Minor					

Chorus 2				Coda
A2		B2		
Clarinet Solo/Break		Clarinet Solo/Break	Break	Ens
2/2/2/2/2/2/2		2/2/2/2	2+2	4
F Minor				A♭ Major

Black Bottom Stompers recording—may have further stimulated and liberated the soloists' imaginations, for the performances of Armstrong and, especially, Dodds surpass their previous efforts.

Table 2 presents the formal scheme of "Wild Man Blues" as recorded by Dodds's Black Bottom Stompers and Armstrong's Hot Seven.

The Hot Seven session represents Dodds at his best. Sounding more comfortable and confident with a slower tempo, his performance is an effective foil for Armstrong's bravura playing (see Example 8).²¹ Rather than restricting himself to a single register, Dodds explores the full compass of the instrument from low F to high C, retaining hardly a pitch or rhythm from his earlier improvisations, although Gunther Schuller's discernment of Dodds's difficulty with the register change on the clarinet is

supported by the squawk on D₄ in bar 53.²² Dodds exhibits flashes of virtuosity in bars 52 and 64 and employs a wider variety of rhythms than before. The “Scotch snap” or sixteenth note–eighth note figure, a feature of Armstrong’s Stompers solos unexploited by Dodds at the time, is now appropriated (bar 41), developed into a rhythmic motive (bars 43, 45, 46), and made the basis of a break (bars 47–48). Straight eighth and sixteenth notes in the breaks, inconsistently applied in the Stompers solos, are here the rule. Dodds also finds a new use for the E₄–F neighbor pattern by balancing it with the B₄–C pattern in bar 44 or using the figure independently in bars 49 and 50. In general, Dodds is less confined to the melody than with the Stompers; after the first few measures and with the exception of bars 57–58, the tune is barely discernable or avoided completely. Likewise, the first two breaks (bars 43–44 and 47–48) bear some semblance to their counterparts on the Stompers recordings, but subsequent ones diverge increasingly from their former shape and content (see Example 4).

Clarinet

88 Fm even 8ths

91 C7

94 Fm even 8ths & 16ths

97 *mp*

100 Fm F7 Bb7 even 8ths

103 Bb7 even 8ths & 16ths

106 Fm C7 Fm even 8ths & 16ths

109 Fm Bbm D7 C7 even 8ths & 16ths

112 F7 Bb7

115 Bb7

118

121

122

Example 4: Dodds's solo in "Wild Man Blues" by Armstrong's Hot Seven

Morton's "Wild Man" a month after the Hot Seven's differs radically from its predecessors, the change effected largely by a relatively fast two-beat tempo which suppresses, or at least minimizes, the blues character. No doubt asked to limit his playing to the low register as Morton requested him to do a few days later for the Morton Trio sides of "Wolverine Blues" and "Mr. Jelly Lord,"²³ Dodds nevertheless seems to adapt comfortably to the composition's arrangement, one of Morton's most intricate. In less than three minutes Morton compresses five textural and timbral combinations—muted cornet solo with rhythm (guitar, tuba, drums) and trombone; alto saxophone solo with rhythm, trombone, and piano; piano solo with drums; clarinet solo with rhythm; full ensemble (itself varying between unison rhythm and collective improvisation)—and sixteen breaks for five instruments. Melody-break combinations utilized by the Stompers and Hot Seven are incorporated, and a sequence of one-bar breaks for ensemble and drums (cymbal) is introduced.²⁴ Morton imposes order on the surfeit of contrast by employing the B section of the chorus as a refrain while reserving the subtle change of a full ensemble accompaniment for the clarinet soloist and the surprise of a trombone break for its final statement.²⁵

Despite the arrangement's ingenuity, flaws of performance prevent "Wild Man Blues" from ranking among Morton's best recordings. The cornet and piano are apparently to open the piece, followed by the rest of the ensemble a bar later. Both takes get off to a bad start. On the first the cornet and piano fail to come in together; on the third the saxophone enters before the rest of the ensemble and the cornet fluffs a note. The cornetist's solo entrance obscures the intended drum break at bar 24 in B1 and the ensemble accompaniment covers the clarinet solo in B3 on both takes as well. See Table 3 for the formal scheme of "Wild Man Blues" by Morton's Red Hot Peppers.

Dodds's alternating breaks with the piano solo form a study in obtaining heightened complexity from a minimum of materials. In the series of four breaks from both takes, each is an amplification of the preceding—either in rhythmic intricacy, extent of range, pitch-content, or combinations thereof. Especially instructive is the progression in take 3, beginning in bars 51–52 with a syncopated F diminished triad. The next break (bars 55–56) adds a new pitch (B_1), expands the range downward a minor second to E_1 , and eliminates syncopation. The third break (bars 59–60) reintroduces syncopation, introduces triplets along with another new pitch (A_2), and expands the range upward a major second to D_2 . The series climaxes with the final break (bars 63–64) in double time over a

(drum roll) Spoken: "Git away from there boy 'fore the wild man gits 'ya" (roar)

Chorus 3									Coda			
A3				B3								
Clarinet Solo/Saxophone Break				Clar	Ens	Dr	Clar	Ens	Sax	Trom	Ens	Ens
2/2/2/2/2/2				2	1	1	2	2	2	2	2	2
F Minor									A ^b			

Johnny's Chicago Boys were actually members of the John Kirby Sextet whom Decca used as a house band for recordings with visiting

The musical score is presented in two systems, each with two staves. The top staff of each system is labeled 'Take 1' and the bottom staff is labeled 'Take 3'. The key signature is three flats (B-flat, E-flat, A-flat). The time signature is 12/8. The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, ties, and dynamic markings. The first system starts with a tempo marking of '♩=69' and a 'Piano' instruction. The second system includes a 'Clarinet' instruction and a 'Fm' (F minor) chord. The third system includes a 'Bb7' (B-flat 7) chord. The fourth system includes a 'C7' (C 7) chord. The fifth system includes a 'Clarinet' instruction, a 'Fm' chord, a 'C7' chord, a 'D#7' (D sharp 7) chord, and an 'Alto Sax' instruction. The score is a transcription of Jelly Roll Morton's 'Blues for You, Johnny' as performed by the Red Hot Peppers.

Example 5: Dodds's solos in Takes 1 and 3 by Jelly Roll Morton's Red Hot Peppers

artists. Only half a generation younger than Dodds but several generations removed musically, Kirby's group provided a collaboration that resulted in a paragon of stylistic incongruity. Even Lil Armstrong, who tried to adapt her playing to the light, sophisticated swing of the

The musical score is written for piano in 12/8 time, featuring a key signature of three flats (B-flat, E-flat, A-flat). It consists of three systems of staves, each with a treble and bass clef. The first system (measures 29-32) includes chord markings Fm, C7, D7, and C7. The second system (measures 33-36) includes Fm and F7. The third system (measures 37-40) includes Bb7. The notation includes various rhythmic figures, including eighth and sixteenth notes, and rests, with some measures containing triplets or slurs.

Example 5: continued

Kirby musicians, provided scant support for her old friend. As a New Yorker Dodds proved himself an unrepentant and unmitigated New Orleanian.

The tempo—even faster than Morton's—appears to be Dodds's chief disadvantage. Although up to its technical demands, Dodds is constrained by the speed, which prevents him from effectively exhibiting the kaleidoscopic nuances of pitch, articulation, and timbre that comprise his special strengths. The quick tempo, too, transforms the character of the piece by infringing on the time allowed to create interesting breaks or fills, the musical point of the original, and precludes its most exciting feature, the double-time break. The rhythm section in fact allows no actual breaks in the solos and only two in the final chorus. Thus Dodd follows the melody more closely than in previous recordings and keeps rhythmic complexity to a minimum.

Table 4 presents the formal scheme of "Wild Man Blues" by Johnny Dodds's Chicago Boys. After rushing through a parody of his earlier recorded breaks in bars 11–12, Dodds comes up empty at opportunities for improvised fills in bars 15–16, 19–20, 27–28, 31–32, and 35–36.

Table 4

Chicago Boys Recording of "Wild Man Blues": Formal Scheme

Section	Intro		Chorus 1		Chorus 2	
Subsection			A1	B1	A2	B2
Instrumentation	Trp	Ens	Clarinet Solo	Clarinet Solo	Trumpet Solo	Trumpet Solo
Measures	2+2	4	16	16	16	16
Keys	B♭		G Minor			

Chorus 3		Chorus 4				Code
A3	B3	A4		B4		
Guitar Solo	Guitar Solo	Ensemble	Clw	Ensemble	Clar	Ens
16	16	14	2	8	2+2	4
G Minor						B♭

Only in the fill of bars 23–24 is there a flash of technical brilliance (see Example 6).

Dodds shines, however, in the concluding ensemble chorus with Shavers, in which he demonstrates his fine ear for counterpoint; the duet is marred solely by the corny break in bars 119–20, a hackneyed version of the fill from bars 23–24 (see Example 7).

III

Dodds's final two years were ones of decline. A precipitative second marriage to Georgia Green in April 1938 alienated his children, who found their stepmother overly critical, distant, and demanding.²⁶ That October Dodds moved from the Three Deuces on 222 North State to a steady job at Rocky Gallo's 29 Club on 47th and Dearborn,²⁷ but within a few months wrote a friend in Cleveland that the 29 Club had closed, work was scarce, and he was thinking of leaving Chicago for New York City.²⁸ A nearly fatal stroke in July 1939 interrupted any travel plans, and, after a six-month recovery, Dodds had to have all his teeth removed.²⁹ Dental problems and poor health, however, could not prevent him from playing weekends with Baby's band at a club on the outskirts of Chicago in early 1940,³⁰ and from recording again with Decca as part of their New Orleans series in June. He had been out of work almost five months³¹ when stricken at his home by a second and fatal stroke the morning of August 8.

Clarinet

Example 6: Dodds's solo with his Chicago Boys

Dodds's premature death prevented him from sharing in many benefits of the New Orleans Revival, but his historic importance was by this time secure. Named one of the "Immortals of Jazz" by *Down Beat* in April 1940, his influence was recalled by Benny Goodman the following year³² and eulogized by John Lucas two years later.³³ Gunther Schuller's subsequent classification of Dodds with Bechet and Noone as one of the three greatest representatives of the New Orleans clarinet tradition has since become standard.³⁴

Historical importance aside, Dodds criticism has been beset by hyperbole. Two examples should suffice to make the point:

Johnny Dodds is a musician idolized by most "experts"—yet his talents were pitifully meager. Anyone who denies that he was frequently out of

The musical score is written for Trumpet and Clarinet. It consists of five systems of two staves each. The key signature has two flats (Bb and Eb), and the time signature is 4/4. The tempo is marked as quarter note = 96. The score includes various chords: Gm, D7, Eb7, Gm, D7, Gm, D7, Gm, G7, C7, C7, F7, Gm, D7, Eb7, D7, Gm, Cm7, D7, Gm, and D7. There are also musical notations such as triplets (indicated by a '3' over a group of notes) and a fermata (indicated by a horizontal line with a vertical line at the end).

Example 7: Dodds-Shavers duet-chorus with Dodds's Chicago Boys

tune proves himself tone-deaf. Without juggling the obvious truth, no one can deny that his tone was thin and screaming. And most authorities who deny that he was a crude technician, that his ideas were simple, repetitive and un-beautiful do not really believe their own assertions. . . .³⁵

The musical score is written for piano and features a key signature of one flat (B-flat major or D minor). It consists of three systems of staves. The first system (measures 130-132) includes a treble staff with a melodic line and a bass staff with a rhythmic accompaniment. Chords Gm, Cm, Bb7, and Db7 are indicated above the treble staff. The second system (measures 133-135) continues the melodic and rhythmic patterns, with G7 and C7 chords indicated. The third system (measures 136-138) concludes the excerpt, featuring F7 and Bb7 chords. The notation includes various note values, rests, and articulation marks, with 'even 8ths' noted in the bass staff of the second system.

Example 7: continued

Johnny's was the highest and most genuine expression of hot jazz ever known. . . . His attacks could not be stopped, his vigor was inexhaustible, surpassing men the stature of Armstrong. . . . His presence in small groups singled him out as the master of masters. . . . Besides being the best and greatest clarinetist known he was a creative genius.³⁶

Though the invective of the first can be refuted by a moment's listening, the plaudits of the second are tainted by the mention of Armstrong, with whom Dodds has long been invidiously compared and by whose presence on recordings he has been said to be intimidated.³⁷ While this may be arguably so for some of the Hot Fives, it is less true for the Hot Sevens in general, and decidedly not the case with "Wild Man Blues." Armstrong's "Wild Man" solo is indeed a masterful incorporation of his advanced rhythmic, harmonic, and formal ideas: the escalating progression of note values in the breaks of bars 11–12, 15–16, 19–20, 23–24; the juxtaposition of minor and major of bar 25; the dominant minor fifteenth (diminished tonic over a dominant seventh) of bars 14 and 26; the applied leading tone seventh chords of bars 36–37; and the climax of bar

Trumpet

♩=88

Fm C7 Fm

Fm C7 Fm

Fm F7 B \flat 7 even 8ths & 16ths

B \flat 7 B \flat 7 even 16ths

Fm C7 (behind the beat)

Fm A Fm B \flat 7 D \sharp 7

C7 F7 B \flat 7 B \flat 7 A \flat F7

B \flat 7 B \flat 7 A \flat A \flat

Example 8: Armstrong's solo in "Wild Man Blues" by his Hot Seven

28 reached exactly at its golden section on an accented high C approached from a high A \flat (see note 24), a combination of pitches to which Armstrong returns to conclude his declamation (see Example 8).

But Dodds's more conservative and less complex Hot Seven solo has its own merits, as noted above. Neither dominated nor intimidated, Dodds's playing complements Armstrong's by being different without being inferior. He facilitates coherence by adopting Armstrong's Scotch snap rhythmic motive and his regular use of even note-values in the breaks. The most noticeable disparity is Dodds's relative lack of swing, or rhythmic phrasing in the lilting triplet subdivisions made definitive by

Armstrong.³⁸ Measured against Armstrong's standard, Dodds's rhythm at times sounds square and old-fashioned but rarely if ever poor, weak, or bad.³⁹ Dodds's rhythmic phrasing is in fact more adventurous than many of his colleagues, of which George Mitchell's relentlessly and predictably syncopated "Wild Man Blues" solo from the Red Hot Peppers recording might serve as a typical example (see Example 9).

The depiction of Dodds emerging from this study, corroborated by those of others⁴⁰ as well as by the opinions of his contemporaries,⁴¹ is that of a largely conventional and somewhat limited player. Within his limitations, however, Dodds reveals an immense capacity for invention. Evident enough in the alternate takes of “Wild Man Blues,” this facility abounds in the two takes of “Wolverine Blues” referred to above. Within a total of six 32-bar choruses—all confined to the chalumeau register and comprised almost exclusively of diatonic arpeggios—Dodds creates two exuberant and motivically organized solos containing virtually no literal duplication.

As an ensemble player, Dodds understands well the clarinetist's descant function within the band, fulfilling it always competently and often consummately; his handling of the harmonic third at the end of phrases, played frequently with little emphasis or as a "throwaway," has been noted as an innovative trademark.⁴² Not an improviser in the extroverted and intuitive manner of Armstrong or Bechet, Dodds evinces in his earliest recorded solos formative devices common to players of his time—constructive techniques he would rely upon in varying degrees

throughout his career; memorization, working-out in advance, and reshuffling of stock phrases.⁴³ Alternate takes of his solos suggest Dodds entered the studio with a rather clear notion of an intended performance to be deviated from minimally. Able to comprehensively revise his conception of a piece over time, he had not the will or imagination to do so instantaneously like, for example, Louis Armstrong, whose breaks and fills in the successive takes of the Stompers' "Wild Man Blues" are equally inventive but totally dissimilar. Finally, his recordings display almost no perceptible musical development or change of style.

Wherein lies Dodds's greatness? Even his harshest critics acclaim his preeminence as a purveyor of the slow blues. No one can make the clarinet cry and moan like Dodds, whose wailing interpretations of the blues have been rightfully hailed as peerless and powerful expressions of emotion and personality.⁴⁴ Nearly impossible to duplicate, his shadings of pitch and tone color resist if not defy imitation. In short, his greatness can be heard but not notated. A propitious balance of technical nuance with structural understanding, Dodds's Hot Seven "Wild Man Blues" solo represents a culmination of his musical virtues, tempting one to concur with a reviewer of that performance: "If Johnny Dodds had never made another recording, 'Wild Man Blues' would be enough to ensure his place as a major artist in the history of jazz."⁴⁵

NOTES

1. Warren Dodds, *The Baby Dodds Story as Told To Larry Gara*, rev. ed. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 1992), 76. "For some unknown reason . . . Herb Jeffries sings the vocal to 'Blue [sic] For You, Johnny' . . . Jeffries, billed as the 'bronze buckaroo' and ordinarily singer with the Ellington band, is from hunger on blues. He has no feeling. . . . And his vocal, stiff and insincere, makes poor Sidney and the others sound bad" (Barrelhouse Dan, *Down Beat* 71, no. 20, October 14, 1940). "Blues for You Johnny" is available on *Sidney Bechet, The Victor Sessions Master Takes 1932-43*, 2402-2-RB (BMG Music, 1990).
2. G.E. Lambert, *Johnny Dodds* (New York: A. S. Barnes, 1961), 40.
3. Transcriptions for this study were made from Classics 603, *Johnny Dodds 1927* (Classics Records, 1991) for take 1 (C-796) and Decca MCAD-42326, *Johnny Dodds: South Side Chicago Jazz* (MCA Records, 1990) for take 2 (C-797).
4. Since Kid Ory, Armstrong's regular trombonist, was in New York

with King Oliver at this time (Walter C. Allen and Brian A.L. Rust, "*King*" Oliver, rev. Laurie Wright [Chigwell, Essex: Storyville, 1987], 76–79) his substitute has been a source of speculation. Although Gunther Schuller (*Early Jazz, Its Roots and Musical Development* [New York: Oxford University, 1968], 108) suggests Honoré Dutrey, most other writers have favored John Thomas, then a member of Tate's Vendome Theater Orchestra, for all the Hot Seven dates. When interviewed forty years later, Thomas, however, could recall making only "12th Street Rag" and "Weary Blues," both cut on May 11, while being certain of Fred Robinson, a regular member of the later Hot Five, as the trombonist on "Alligator Crawl" and "Keyhole Blues," recorded respectively on May 10 and May 13 (Bertrand Demeusy, "The Musical Career of John Thomas," *Jazz Journal* 20, no. 1 [1967]:23). The trombone barely plays on "Wild Man Blues," but the solo on "Willie the Weeper," recorded the same day and presumably by the same trombonist, sounds to this author more like Robinson than Thomas or Dutrey.

5. Transcriptions for this study were made from Columbia CK 44253, *Louis Armstrong: The Hot Fives & Hot Sevens*, Volume II (CBS Records, 1988).
6. Three takes were made but the second was destroyed and the third was unknown until reissued in 1979 by Meritt Records; see Laurie Wright, *Mr. Jelly Lord* (Chigwell, Essex: Storyville, 1980), 45. Transcriptions for this study were made from Bluebird 2361-2-RB, *The Jelly Roll Morton Complete Victor Recordings* (BMG Music, 1990).
7. Transcriptions for this study were made from Classics 635, *Johnny Dodds 1928–1940* (Classics Records, 1992).
8. Copyright deposits of the lead sheet, piano solo, and orchestration are on microfilm in the Music Division of the Library of Congress. An edited version of the piano solo appears in James Dupagny, *Ferdinand "Jelly Roll" Morton: The Collected Piano Music* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 1982).
9. *Chicago Defender* October 9, 1926.
10. November 14, 1925.
11. *Mr. Jelly Lord*, 45; author's interview of Bill Russell in New Orleans, March 27, 1989.
12. See Gene Anderson, "Johnny Dodds in New Orleans," *American Music* 8, no. 4 (winter 1990); 403–40.
13. For questions about the date, see Gene Anderson, "The Genesis of King Oliver's Creole Jazz Band," *American Music* 12, no. 3 (fall 1994):283–303.

14. "*King*" Oliver, Wright rev., 33; *The Baby Dodds Story*, rev. ed., 48; Bill Russell interview of Baby Dodds, May 31, 1958 (Tulane Jazz Archive). John Dodds Jr. said his father broke with Oliver over money (author's interview of John Dodds Jr., Chicago, March 4, 1989). Financial disputes were not unprecedented for Oliver, who had attempted to embezzle funds collected for band uniforms in New Orleans before coming to Chicago (Bill Russell interview of Lewis Keppard, January 19, 1961, Tulane Jazz Archive). For more on the demise of the Creole Band, see Frederick Ramsey and Charles Edward Smith, *Jazzmen* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1939), 74–5; Onah Spencer, "Preston Jackson Recalls First Gig," *Down Beat* 9, no. 21 (November 1, 1942), 23; and Bill Russell interview of Preston Jackson, June 1, 1958, (Tulane Jazz Archive).
15. *The Baby Dodds Story*, rev. ed., 52. Although back with the Creole Band for their final recordings of October 25, 1923, Dodds was possibly no longer a regular member ("*King*" Oliver, Wright rev., 38). On August 24, 1929, the *Chicago Defender* reported that "Johnny Dodds, the clarinet wizard, and his orchestra are still holding down the job at Kelly's Stables and are a big attraction. These boys have been on this one job seven [*sic*] years."
16. "Jungle music" was popular; "Jungle Blues" was "Wild Man's" companion piece at the Peppers' session.
17. All musical examples are in concert pitch and have been transcribed by the author.
18. Schuller (*Early Jazz*, 202) was the first to call attention to Dodds's unique vibrato; his brief discussion of Dodds's playing remains the most balanced and perceptive in the literature.
19. John Steiner interview of John Dodds Jr. from liner notes to "Johnny Dodds, Chicago Mess Around," Milestone Records, MLP 2011 (1969). The flutter-tonguing Gunther Schuller heard on a 1925 Lovie Austin recording (*Early Jazz*, 200) was undoubtedly that of Jimmie O'Bryant and not Dodds.
20. This double-time break is a favorite of Dodds. Besides the recordings of "Wild Man" with Morton (Example 5, bars 63–64), a version of it appears in "After You've Gone" recorded with his Black Bottom Stompers on October 8, 1927.
21. Armstrong's relatively subdued Stompers solos were an attempt to disguise his playing on Brunswick from OKeh with whom he was under contract. His deception, however, was treated as a joke by an OKeh executive who purchased the Stompers recording and called

- in Armstrong to identify the trumpet player (1953 Armstrong radio interview, Cassette 26, Louis Armstrong Archive, Queens College, Flushing, NY).
22. *Early Jazz*, 200. The register change on the clarinet occurs between A_{\flat} and A_{\sharp} concert.
 23. *The Baby Dodds Story*, rev. ed., 75.
 24. The pianissimo cymbal break following the fortissimo entrance of the ensemble comprises the dramatic climax of the chorus and occurs at its golden section (e.g., the 20th bar or 0.618 of its length). Other instances of proportional relationships are the second of successive two-bar breaks in the chorus at the golden section of Morton's B sections and Armstrong's accented high C at the golden section of his Hot Seven solo (see Example 8). For an introduction to the golden section in music see Roy Howat, "Bartok, Lendvai and the Principles of Proportional Analysis," *Music Analysis* 2, no. 1 (1983), 69–95.
 25. The trombone break is taken note-for-note from Morton's lead sheet as is the cornet's (see Example 9, bars 19–20).
 26. Author's interview of John Jr. and Dorothy Dodds Davis, Chicago, June 18, 1989.
 27. Dodds had Anatie "Natty" Dominique on trumpet, Fred "Tubby" Hall on drums, and Leo Montgomery on piano in his 29 Club band (*Chicago Defender*, November 11, 1938); see also weekly reviews of 29 Club in the *Chicago Defender* from October 22, 1938 through January 14, 1939. On the Three Deuces and 29 Club, see also *The Baby Dodds Story*, rev. ed., 55–58. For an incident at the 29 Club involving Dodds, see *Jazzmen*, 186–87.
 28. Dodds wrote to thank jazz enthusiast Hoyte Kline about locating a replacement for his clarinet currently "on the bum." The letters, dated March 23 and April 3, 1939, were shared with the author by Bill Russell in New Orleans, March 24, 1989.
 29. Notices of Dodds's stroke and recovery appear in July (6, no. 7:1), August (6, no. 8:2), and December (6, no. 14:9) 1939 issues of *Down Beat*. Dodds mentions the impending extraction of his teeth in a postcard to Bill Russell of January 29, 1940 (shared by Russell with the author in New Orleans, March 24, 1989).
 30. The booking at the 9750 Club on 9750 South Western Avenue, lasted from January 20 to March 18; see notices in *Jazz Information* of January 26, February 2, February 16, and March 8, 1940. See also *The Baby Dodds Story*, rev. ed. 67–8.

31. *Jazz Information* (April 26, 1940):6; "What's the Beat?" *Down Beat* 7, no. 14 (July 15, 1940):5.
32. Benny Goodman, "My Ten Favorite Clarinetists," *Music and Rhythm* 2, no. 11 (October 1941):8.
33. "Jazz Clarys, Henchmen of Kings," *Down Beat* 10, no. 6 (March 15, 1943):19.
34. *Early Jazz*, 198–203.
35. D. Leon Wolff, "Bix Half-Baked, Johnny Dodds Corny, Tesch Out of Tune," *Down Beat* 8, no. 11 (June 1, 1941):8. The stylistic bias of the author is clinched by the title of a later *Down Beat* article, "Bop Nowhere, Armstrong Just a Myth," 16, no. 11 (June 17, 1949).
36. José Francisco Riesco, *El jazz clasico y Johnny Dodds, su rey sin corona* (Santiago, 1972), 195 (Riesco's translation).
37. André Hodeir, *Jazz, Its Evolution and Essence*, trans. David Noakes (New York: Grove, 1956), 60.
38. For an informative but tortuous definition of swing as the "essence of jazz," see Hodeir, 195–209.
39. On Dodds's rhythmic weaknesses, see Hodeir, 52–4, 59 and Schuller, 105, 108, 203.
40. Besides Schuller, see Humphrey Lyttleton *The Best of Jazz, Basin Street to Harlem* (New York: Taplinger, 1978), 163–77.
41. For a survey, see Anderson, "Johnny Dodds in New Orleans," 415–16.
42. Sandy Brown, "Johnny Dodds, A Clarinetist's View," *Storyville* (February 1966), 12.
43. Dodds's "Dippermouth Blues" solo on the OKeh recording of June 1923 is a repetition of the Gennett "Dippermouth" solo two months earlier, his solo from the same period on "High Society Rag" is a New Orleans set piece (see William J. Schafer, "Breaking Into 'High Society': Musical Metamorphoses in Early Jazz," *Journal of Jazz Studies* 2, no. 3 [1975]:53–60), his back-to-back choruses in "Room Rent Blues" in October 1923 are almost identical, and his breaks in two versions of "Working Man Blues," recorded three weeks apart also in October 1923, are measure-for-measure redistributions of the same pitches. On the emergence of the improvised solo in jazz, see James Lincoln Collier, *Jazz, the American Theme Song* (New York: Oxford University, 1993), 25–47.
44. E.g., Hodeir, 60–1, and Lyttleton, 172.
45. Bob Dawbarn, "Great Jazz Solos," *Melody Maker* 42, no. 8 (February 25, 1967).